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A BASIC SCIENCE AND RELIGION 'PRIMER'

Fraser Fleming, *The Truth about Science and Religion: From the Big Bang to Neuroscience* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 2017. £18.50. pp. xvii + 221. ISBN: 978-0-7188-9471-9).

Fraser Fleming's *The Truth about Science and Religion* may have a title which causes the raising of an eyebrow (can there possibly be a single 'truth' about so complex a pair of intersecting concepts as science and religion?), but its subtitle offers a surer indication of its contents. The author, a professor of chemistry, takes the reader through a summary of the current state of scientific knowledge regarding such topics as cosmology, the origins of life, evolution, anthropology and neuroscience. There is a short account of the history of science and religion, focussing on key figures such as Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Einstein. Interspersed with these themes are reflections on Biblical narratives, focussing on the opening chapters of Genesis and the Gospels: here the straightforward, uncomplicated approach will resonate most with those of a conservative disposition.

The book's 'u.s.p.' (unsurprisingly, given its provenance) is the significant attention paid to chemical processes in the opening chapters: too often these have been overlooked by authors coming from backgrounds in physics or the biological sciences. For the most part Fleming is a sure guide through the topics covered. Attention is frequently drawn to observations for which science cannot currently account, although the author rightly warns against 'God-of-the-gaps' arguments. Occasionally there is a lack of explanation of terms within his own field (I am not sure how clear the term 'highly reducing environment' (p. 48) will be to a non-chemist), and a confusion in the use of terms outside it (effects from chaos and quantum theories are insufficiently distinguished on p. 62: Dawkins' 'memes' are not concerned with 'the influence of culture on evolution', p. 205). There are also some contentious generalisations: for example, this reviewer does not believe it to be the case that 'most theologians and scientists involved at the interface of the two domains pursue an integration approach' to science and religion (p. 200).

Fleming states that his hope in writing his book is 'that engagement with the ideas will facilitate individuals in developing a holistic religious and scientific mental framework for understanding of the world' (p. xvii). To that end, each chapter concludes with a set of questions 'for personal reflection or ... group dialogue' (p. xvii). There is certainly much here with which to engage, and plenty to encourage that holistic approach.

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